

## **PART 121-6: FUTURE LAND USE PLAN – 2025**

This Part of the Plan describes the recommended 2025 Future Land Use Plan for the State of Rhode Island. A Future Land Use Map-2025, depicting a preferred general pattern of land use for the state in 2025, is presented and described.

The pattern of land use in Rhode Island in 2025 cannot be known with certainty from the vantage point of 2005, the year when this plan was prepared. However, as described and documented in earlier parts of this document, it is possible to assess trends, consider where they are leading, and devise alternative paths which, if pursued, could produce differing outcomes. In this regard, the Future Land Use Plan—2025 is the culmination of not only the geographic analysis, but also much of the analysis and forecasting described earlier in the plan.

Planning is an *intentional* process. It is about *assessing* where our communities and our state are heading, *thinking* today about what our aspirations for our communities and our state are for tomorrow, and *deciding* collectively what steps we can take together to move our communities towards what they can and should be like in the future.

Or, as the previous (1989) edition of the State Land Use Policies and Plan so elegantly put it, “comparing what we expect and what we would like with what we have, in terms of our land and water resources, is the base from which this state land use plan emerges.” ((19))

This is the process that this plan, taken as a whole, documents. The 2025 Future Land Use Plan Map offers a geographic and symbolic expression of our visions for the future landscape and of our intentions for the best usage of our state’s land in the future.

### **6-1 Future Land Use Categories**

#### *Previous State Land Use Plans*

Earlier versions of the State Land Use Policies and Plan, in 1975 and 1989, took similar, but different routes, but arrived at similar recommendations in terms of overall patterns of land use. While not supported by the levels of data and computerized geographic analysis available for this update, they both recommended a compact development pattern for the state that would concentrate development on lands within and adjoining existing urbanized areas where public services were available or were planned. The 1975 plan took a more traditional approach, assigning land to one of twelve specific use categories, including high, medium, and low density residential, three types of commercial, industrial, three categories of open space, and governmental/institutional and airports. In 1989, the approach used was to assign land to four generalized intensity potential categories, and to describe the state’s intentions regarding the possible land uses and intensities to which these should be put. This later approach, which recognizes that the purpose of this plan is to provide guidance for the (vast majority of) land use decisions made on a local basis, is also followed in this current version. In distinction from the more recent prior plan, however, this plan attempts to define land categories that are more descriptive and intuitive than the somewhat cryptic legend codes used in 1989.

### *Proposed 2025 Land Use Categories*

The categories proposed to guide the state towards realization of this plan's state's vision for future land use in 2025 are described in this section. Guidance is provided on the intentions of the plan as to the general intensities of use for various areas, and examples given of the general types of land use and landscape features that each category should embrace in the future.

To understand the various categories, requires first the identification and understanding of a new concept: an *Urban Service Area Boundary*. In distinction to its predecessor, this edition of the Future State Land Use Plan Map includes a line denoted as the "Urban Services Boundary." This line translates the boundary of the Composite Scenario onto the Future Land Use Map. Recalling from Part 121-5 that the Scenario analysis was performed to test alternative urban patterns and select the most desirable for the state's future, the intent of showing the urban services boundary on the Future Land Use Map is to denote that significant demarcation in urban pattern – the future boundary of areas that should be more urban in character versus those that should retain a rural character. Lands inside (e.g., toward existing urban/developed areas) the Urban Services Area Boundary are anticipated to have a high level of public service available and be the location of more intensive development through 2025. Areas outside the Urban Service Area are anticipated to have a lower level of public services available, and are generally (except for potential centers) proposed for lower intensities of development or for reservation as conservation areas and productive rural resource lands.

Two further major categorical demarcations are *Future Use Potential Areas* and *Committed Use Areas*.

*Future Use Potential Areas* include undeveloped land areas within the urban service areas found in the geographic analysis to be suited for high, medium or low intensity development. Also included are lands indicated as presently committed to a developed use within the urban service area. These four categories, along with potential centers outside the urban service boundary, are identified as the optimum areas for accommodating the bulk of the state's development needs through 2025. They are areas where growth, be it new development, or reuse, infill, and re-development of existing committed urban land at more intensive levels, should generally be encouraged by state and local policies and investment programs. They are areas where the most change is anticipated in the future. Future Use Potential Areas also include lands that were shown through the geographic analysis as being more suited for conservation uses, and lands outside the urban service area boundary and potential centers that are not needed to accommodate the state's growth needs. In these categories it is recommended that growth and development not be encouraged or supported.

*Committed Use Areas* include currently developed land outside the urban service area as well as currently protected parkland and open space areas, and water bodies and wetlands. Active prime farmland is also identified as a committed use area. The intention is that these areas should generally remain in these productive uses.

More detailed descriptions of the future land use categories and their intended uses are provided in Table 121-06(1).

**Table 121-06(1)**  
**FUTURE LAND USE 2025 CATEGORIES AND INTENDED USES**

## 1. FUTURE USE POTENTIAL AREAS

**A. Growth** – Areas recommended to accommodate the state’s anticipated growth needs through 2025 include:

### **Maintenance / Infill / Reuse** –



**Urban Developed** – Areas identified as developed within the urban service area. These areas generally have, or are likely to be provided with, most urban-level services (especially public water and/or sewer) through 2025. Typical uses include residential of varying types and generally of medium (1-2 du./ac.) to high (4+ du./ac.) densities (with many areas at substantially higher densities), along with substantial commercial, industrial, mixed, and institutional uses, and supporting infrastructure (transport, utilities, parks and recreation areas). A number of existing regional employment and service centers and civic uses are included in this category. The category also includes underutilized lands (abandoned/derelect commercial/industrial sties, and vacant land). Priorities for Urban-Developed lands are maintenance and enhancement of productive uses and re-use of underutilized areas to accommodate growth at intensities that efficiently utilize available services.

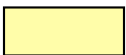
**Development** – Areas recommended for development through 2025 include:



**High Intensity** — Uncommitted land within the urban service area that is generally capable of accommodating the more intensive forms of urban-type development. These areas have fewer resource constraints and have, or are likely to be provided with, urban-level services including public water and/or sewer service through 2025. Residential uses at densities of four or more dwelling units per acre overall may be accommodated, with some areas significantly higher density, to offer a variety of housing types and configurations (including multi-family, high-rise). Commercial, industrial and/or mixed development along with institutional and civic uses and supporting infrastructure (transport, utilities, parks and recreation areas) are also encompassed in this category. Some areas may accommodate more intensive (multi-story) commercial/mixed uses serving regional needs. The priority for High Intensity areas is urban-type development at densities that enable efficient provision and utilization of public services, including transit.



**Moderate Intensity** — Uncommitted land within the urban service area that is generally capable of accommodating a medium level of urban development. These areas may have some resource constraints, but have, or are likely to be provided with, urban-level services, especially public water service, through 2025. They would generally include residential uses at average densities of one to four dwelling units per acre (with some areas of higher density), including single family dwellings (attached and detached), garden apartments and similar multi-family complexes. They may include areas of mixed residential, commercial, and low-impact industrial uses, as well as office/industrial areas and supporting institutional uses and infrastructure.



**Low Intensity** — Uncommitted land within the urban service area that is generally capable of accommodating a lower level of urban development. These areas generally have, or are likely to be provided with, some urban-level services, particularly public water service, through 2025; but include resource constraints which limit their potential for intensive use. They would generally include residential uses at an average density of under one dwelling unit per acre, as well as open land (farmland, forests, wetlands). Conservation/open space-style development, and similar techniques should be relied upon to limit development intensities and impacts and to conserve land within these areas. Small commercial or mixed use areas to service local needs, and isolated, low-impact industrial uses, and supporting infrastructure would also be encompassed.

*Note: All development intensity categories are likely to also include smaller areas having locally-significant resource values or locally-important sites, such as greenway corridors or scenic viewsheds. Such areas are appropriate for conservation via public or private land protection efforts.*

**B. Conservancy — Areas recommended to be retained substantially undeveloped, open land through 2025 are:**



**Conservation/Limited** – Uncommitted lands that possess significant resource values requiring protection. These areas are best suited for resource protection, sustainable resource production, and associated low intensity/low-impact uses compatible with protection of resource values. Land management techniques should be relied upon to limit intensities of use, emphasize compact development, minimize resource impacts, and to conserve open land within these areas. Residential densities should average no more than 0.25 dwelling unit per acre, with substantial areas of protected land and/or working lands (agriculture/silviculture) included. Development within these areas must adhere to stringent standards for water management and best impact avoidance practices.



**Reserve** – Includes uncommitted open lands that are not required to accommodate the state's development needs through 2025. While these areas are generally capable of supporting varying types and intensities of development, public development assistance must be carefully balanced with the objectives of retaining the state's rural working landscapes (agriculture/silviculture), protecting resource values, and providing a reserve of land for future use (beyond 2025). Land management techniques should be relied upon to limit intensities of use, emphasize compact development, minimize resource impacts, and to conserve open land within these areas.

**C. Other potential elements of future land use through 2025 include:**



**New Town Centers** — Includes potential new compact developed areas having a defined central core providing many of the functions needed by the residents of the town and its economic region. Uses include residential -- at higher densities that provide optimum utilization of land and services and offer a diverse housing stock, commercial, industrial, office, cultural, and governmental uses. Town centers characteristically are developed with a human scale of blocks, streets, and open spaces; offering easy walking and access to transit where available.



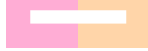
**New Village Centers** — Includes potential compact mixed-use communities that offer basic consumer services and activities for their residents as well as nearby residents. Villages are not intended as major regional shopping or employment centers, but should provide opportunities for higher density housing and limited commercial and supporting services. In suburban areas, new village centers should be distinguished from surrounding development by a more cohesive development form and closer proximity between residential and non-residential uses. In rural areas, new villages should be surrounded by natural areas, farmland, or open space and may have a commercial area in the core for neighborhood-scale goods and services.

*Note: New Town and Village Centers depicted on the Future Land Use Map are illustrative of potential new centers that may be established. Existing centers are generally not shown, and other new centers may be proposed through local initiative.*



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Rail Station – New passenger rail stations anticipated through 2025. (Planned and proposed stations are shown – not all may be realized.) New rail stations should provide an impetus for new centers or other transit-oriented development.



Urban Services Boundary—General bound of the areas within which public services supporting urban development presently exist, or are likely to be provided, through 2025. Within the urban services area most land should be served by public water service and many areas will have public sewer service available as well. Public transit service should be generally available, with high density corridors providing frequent headways. The intent of the Urban Services Area Boundary is to provide a indication for planning purposes of areas where a high level of public services is anticipated to be available to accommodate intensive development. Public services in areas outside the Urban Services Boundary are anticipated to be more limited, and planned development intensities should accordingly be lower.

## 2. COMMITTED USE AREAS

*The future map also shows areas that are presently committed to a particular land use, or intensity level. In most cases, these uses are anticipated to continue in their present status.*

### A. Conservancy: Existing protected areas to be conserved:



Major Parks & Open Space – Includes lands held by federal, state, and local governments, and private non-profit conservation organizations for public recreation or conservation uses.

*Note: not all protected lands are shown due to scale and data limitations.*



Active Prime Farmland – Areas currently in active agricultural usage which are situated on soils identified as Prime Farmland Soils by the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service. Active prime farmland should be maintained in active agricultural production or as a strategic food supply reserve for the future.



Water Bodies—Coastal and inland open water areas -- to be protected and conserved.



Wetlands – Areas identified as fresh and salt water wetlands, exclusive of open water wetland types. Wetland areas are to be protected and conserved.

### B. Transport: Major existing transportation infrastructure to be maintained and enhanced for continuing optimum utilization potential:



Airport -- State airport

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Rail Station – Existing rail passenger station



Rail Line -- Active rail lines



Major Highway – National Highway System highways

### ***C. Developed -- Committed: Existing land uses presumed to be continued***



**Non-urban Developed**—Includes lands identified as developed which are outside of the urban service boundary. These areas generally lack public water or sewer service, and are not anticipated to have such services through 2025. Uses include residential, generally at medium to low (<1 du./ac.) densities, as well as some areas of commercial, industrial, and mixed use, and associated supporting land uses (institutional, utilities, park facilities, etc.) Maintenance of these uses in productive use via enhancement and limited expansion is anticipated.

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## **6-2 Future Land Use -- 2025**

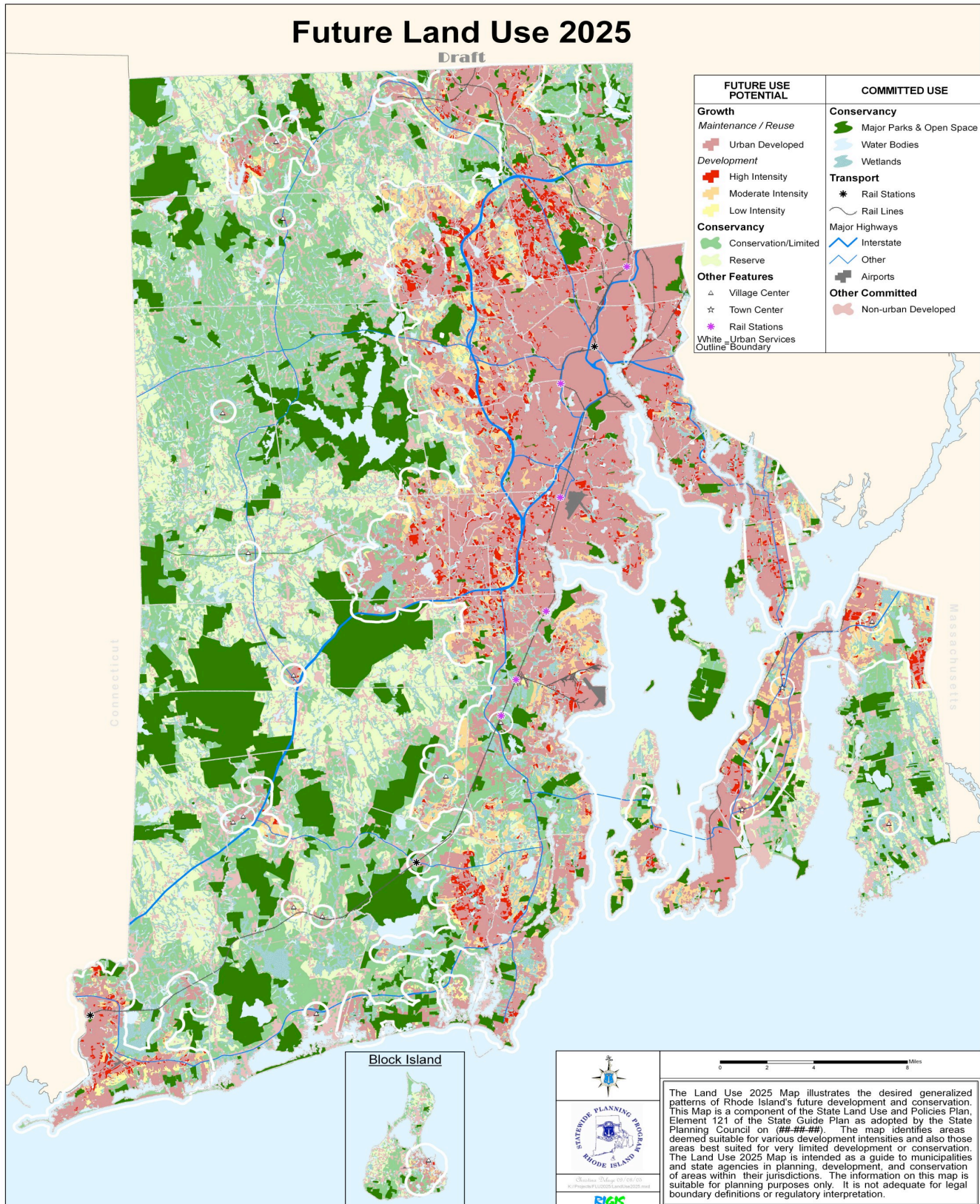
Figure 121-6(1) presents the Future Land Use Map – 2025 for the State of Rhode Island. The Future Land Use 2025 Map illustrates the *generalized* patterns of Rhode Island's future development and conservation. The Land Use 2025 Map is a component of the State Land Use Policies and Plan element of the State Guide Plan as adopted by the State Planning Council on (date), and should be interpreted and construed within the context of that document. The map identifies areas deemed suitable for various development intensities and also those areas best suited for very limited development or conservation.

*The 2025 Land Use Map is intended as a guide to municipalities and state agencies in planning, development, and conservation of areas within their jurisdictions. Municipalities and state agencies should utilize the map when preparing updates or amendments to their comprehensive plans, and to assist in directing or setting priorities for infrastructure investments and other development assistance, including the review of major facilities, or development projects. Pursuant to the Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act, municipalities have up to one year to make any necessary amendments to their local comprehensive plans necessary to attain consistency with a newly-adopted State Guide Plan element.*

The 2025 Land Use Map was created based upon land capability and infrastructure availability analysis using ARCGIS 9 geographic information systems software and the most recent datasets available within the R. I. Geographic Information System. Because it is based upon source data of varying source scales, standards, and currencies, the map is only a guide of generalized applicability and is not to be used for determinations affecting individual sites or small areas.

**DRAFT**  
**Figure 121-06(1)**

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**Note: A revised version of this map reflecting changes recommended at the September meeting will be available at the October meeting**